

Chapter 1174

A man who can't even answer. (4)

Chung Myung silently gazed at the moon in the sky.

Chung Mun's face seemed to overlap with the moon, appearing familiar and dearly missed, smiling gently as he looked at Chung Myung.

«Amusing...»

Chung Myung pursed his lips.

«A man who can't even answer.»

An inevitable resentment and an unavoidable longing. Despite knowing that this person was no longer there, there were times when he couldn't help but recall that face.

Looking intently at Chung Mun's face overlapping with the moon, Chung Myung spoke with a slightly elevated voice.

«No, it's not like that.»

A faint smile escaped his lips.

«I'm how old now, and that baldy will be shocked to hear any nonsense. Whatever I say, he wouldn't hear it even with his giant earlobes. It's not like I've only seen those big-mouthed guys once or twice.»

He waved his hand nonchalantly. However, he soon lowered his voice, sounding somewhat weakened.

«Just... «

With a hint of hesitation, he raised his head. He looked at the night sky, pitch black without clouds or the moon.

«Not because of what the bald man said... just reconsidering my situation. I tried not to think about it if possible.»

Contrary to others' speculations, what shook Chung Myung the most among the words Beop Jong spoke was, 'I should be at the very back.'

Because that statement was not incorrect.

Beop Jong is no fool. The one leading everything should be in the safest place. That's something he naturally understands. That's why, in the past war against Demonic Cult, didn't he try his best to keep Chung Mun away from the frontline?

The reason is simple. Chung Myung, at that time, didn't possess the capacity to lead the entire sect. Even if he was strong, if he lost Chung Mun in a situation where he has already lost Chung Jin, Hwasan would have lost its focal point and wouldn't be able to exert its full power.

Yes, being the leader is that important.

Despite knowing this fact, Chung Myung has always stood on the front lines. And he has repeated the most reckless deeds. He had a strong belief in his accumulated experiences.

However... Chung Myung also knows. He knows that the 'Heavenly Luck' that has persisted from his previous life to the present is by no means eternal.

If he continues to adhere to the current way, there might come a day when the disciples of Hwasan would witness Chung Myung's cold body as predicted by Beop Jong. And after that, destruction probably awaits Hwasan. A complete destruction that no one can escape.

«I'm not that great...»

Chung Myung forced a light, hollow laugh.

The idea of destruction seemed absurd. Could Chung Myung's efforts alone play as significant a role as the word 'destruction' implied? If the disciples of Hwasan continue to grow, they would be capable of much more than Chung Myung.

«Yeah, that's true.»

Chung Myung muttered weakly, his head hanging low.

He truly believed so.

If Baek Cheon became a proper leader, following in the footsteps of the past Chung Mun, if Yoon Jong became a true Taoist guiding the way for the lacking Tao of the current Hwasan, if Jo Geol became the assault leader of Hwasan, and Yu Iseol became the fundamental guide for the sword pursued by Hwasan, and Tang Soso became a strict teacher for the disciples of Hwasan...

If all the other disciples could fulfill their roles from their positions, Hwasan would become a much stronger and remarkable martial arts sect than when Chung Mun led it in the past.

Chung Myung was confident in this, having observed them for a long time.

Though he always treated them as kids, ignoring and pressuring them, they were truly exceptional talents. They surpassed the old Chung Myung by an incomparable degree.

Yes, it will definitely... it will surely happen.

That's why it's even more regrettable.

«It's cruel, isn't it, Sect Leader Sahyeong?»

Chung Myung sighed disappointingly.

«If only there were ten more years... I could have truly made it happen. Even without me leading, those kids could have reached that point on their own.»

As always, the world doesn't grant them enough time. Aware of this fact, Chung Myung tirelessly led Hwasan since returning to this world. Always aiming for a slightly higher place. Yet, he ultimately couldn't reach it in time.

If it were ten years later, Chung Myung would have fought on the front lines without any hesitation, saving even one more person. There would be plenty of others to fulfill the role he should do from behind.

But not now. His death at this moment would be an irreplaceable loss to the entire sect. To save even one more person, Chung Myung must not stand on the front lines. Yes, to save more...

«How ironic.»

Chung Myung bitterly chuckled. He posed a question, asking what would happen to Haenam. It should have been a question without an answer for Beop Jong.

However, whether it was intentional or not, the question came back to Chung Myung. Just as Shaolin needed to prove the righteousness of its cause through Haenam, Chung Myung now has to prove what he means by following the righteous path.

One day, Chung Myung will inevitably face it.

In a situation where he might have to sacrifice all the other disciples just to save one disciple of Hwasan.

What would he do in such a circumstance?

To put it to the extreme, if there were no other way than to charge the entire Hwasan into Demonic Cult's stronghold in order to save the one hundred thousand people who have fallen into their trap... What choice should he make?

Would he ignore Baek Cheon's desperate plea, vomiting blood, shouting that he shouldn't come and throw his life away with everyone else?

Or would he tear his own eardrums, stab his eyes, and turn his body away with the determination to cut off his arm, if there was no other method?

«Sahyeong.»

Chung Myung murmured bitterly.

«You're quite an extraordinary person. When I want to get close, it seems far away again...»

He never considered surpassing Chung Mun from the beginning. However, now he thought he might understand a little of what he felt and pondered in the past.

But every time, he learns anew. What the past Chung Mun had overcome.

«The Sword of Hwasan...»

Chung Myung laughed.

It would have been nice if it could have been like that. Because you don't have to think about a sword, just swinging it would suffice.

The position Chung Myung desired was exactly that – a position where he didn't have to think. A place where he could fight as he pleased and not bear any responsibilities.

But he knows.

He cannot become the Sword of Hwasan. Perhaps someday, he might be able to return to his original place, but currently, he cannot be a complete sword. No one from Hwasan can wield him freely. No one can even properly lift the sword named Chung Myung.

In that case, he has no choice but to move on his own. He must think and choose with his own will and identity.

«Sect Leader Sahyeong.»

Chung Myung slowly uttered, letting out a laugh.

«Sorry. At that time, I didn't even understand the topic...»

When he tried to go rescue Chung Jin, Chung Mun stopped him. At that moment, Chung Myung poured out his anger at Chung Mun, not hiding his true emotions.

But now he knows. How unreasonable his actions were.

One who doesn't have to bear the responsibility for the choice shouldn't dare to say such words to someone who has to fully accept the consequences of that choice.

«But... I still don't really understand, Sahyeong.»

Chung Myung's vacant gaze turned towards the moon.

«I know I have to make a choice, but I don't know what to choose. So, I kept postponing it, but eventually, it led me here.»

He thought that if he could train the disciples of Hwasan to become stronger, perhaps he wouldn't have to face that irrational choice until the enemies revealed themselves. No, he believed in that.

Expressing the anger that he couldn't face the impending death of his Sahyongs, it was Chung Myung who, more than anyone else, was turning away from the death they were facing.

Having seen too much death, he painfully understands how agonizing the sudden absence of those who were once together can be.

So, he lacks the confidence to make a choice.

He can't boldly say that saving more lives, like Beop Jong, is right, and he can't dismiss and discard emotions ruthlessly. Nor can he lead everyone into the midst of impending death, rescue one person, and consider it a great achievement.

If he were to face such a situation, Chung Myung would be helpless. He would just sit there, unsure of what to do, and let things unfold.

And eventually, that would lead Hwasan to destruction. Chung Myung's hesitation, his indecisiveness, would push Hwasan into an inescapable abyss.

«As I lived longer, I thought I'd become an adult.»

He has already lived enough. No, he has lived too long. He has persistently prolonged his life that should have already been severed.

«But... it seems there are people destined to become adults from the start. I was someone who couldn't become that.»

How nice it would be if Chung Mun were by his side at a time like this.

If there were someone here who could make the choices he couldn't, someone to share the burden ahead. If it were even Chung Jin, not Chung Mun, who could be here and help...

«It's greed.»

Chung Myung shook his head.

Longing for those who are already gone won't change anything. The fact that he misses them is evidence of how weakened Chung Myung has become, nothing more, nothing less.

He glanced down at the bottle firmly gripped in his hand. Looking at the untouched alcohol inside, he sighed and then spoke.

«Do you have a cup?»

There was no immediate response.

However, as if Chung Myung naturally expected it, he didn't turn his head and continued listening.

«I didn't bring a cup.»

Thud, thud.

Accompanied by the familiar sound of footsteps, Baek Cheon approached and sat down next to him.

Then, without hesitation, Baek Cheon snatched the bottle from Chung Myung's hand.

«A guy who won't even pour it into a cup.»

Baek Cheon tilted the bottle, gulping down the alcohol in one go.

Chung Myung silently observed him.

«Ah.»

Baek Cheon lowered the bottle frowning.

«It's strong.»

«That's how alcohol should be.»

Chung Myung received the bottle Baek Cheon offered, but unlike usual, he didn't bring it to his lips. He simply placed it down without taking a sip.

Observing him quietly, Baek Cheon shifted his gaze forward and spoke.

«What are you doing here?»

«I'm just here.»

«Is that so?»

As Baek Cheon gazed at the moon in the sky, he slowly continued,

«I was relieved.»

«What?»

«You are...»

Baek Cheon's voice that came out was calm, yet it carried an indescribable sound.

«You're also human.»

The moon above the Yangtze River vanished, torn by the incoming waves.